



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

to strengthen teaching in public schools®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2018 Volume I: Race, Class and Punishment

The American Dream, "Members Only": A Look at Educational, Economic and Social Systems of Oppression and the Founding Fathers who Engineered It

Curriculum Unit 18.01.04, published September 2018
by Sean Means

Demographics

Pittsburgh Westinghouse is a 6-12 school located on the East End of Pittsburgh. It is a Title I school and has been for many years. According to the PA School Performance Profile, the school's enrollment hovers just under 700 students. (1) The racial demographic of the student body is 97% African American, 1% White, and 2% other. Of those students, 82% of their households are identified as economically disadvantaged. The gender demographic is evenly split: 50% male students and 50% female students. High school students take the Keystone, the Pennsylvania state exam. Data from the 2016-2017 school year shows student proficiency scores of 14.12% in Algebra, 18.52% in Literature, and 13.10% in Biology. Within the past ten years, the school has merged with Peabody and Wilksburg, two schools with similar challenges to the ones at Westinghouse. The school has had nine principals in eight years and struggled with teacher retention.

Rational

"There are levels to this" is a phrase used by my two favorite ESPN anchors, Michael Smith and Jemele Hill. The levels of oppression are found at the local, state and federal levels. They are tightly woven between the stars and stripes into the fabric of America's narrative and have created an impenetrable curtain between prosperity and poverty. The original architects created a masterpiece of division, and many of their structures remain standing both in physical and sociological forms. This isn't by accident. It's as American as apple pie.

One of my favorite pieces of literature from the Civil Rights Movement wasn't spoken or written on this continent at all, but was presented before a packed house at Cambridge University. There, in front of eager onlookers, James Baldwin debated William Buckley on the topic of "Is the American Dream at the Expense of the American Negro?" While Buckley gave a competent argument, Baldwin effectively contends that America's prosperity is the result of a nation methodically exploiting marginalized people for centuries. Baldwin explains these "levels:"

From a very literal point of view, the harbors and the ports and the railroads of the country- the economy, especially in the South—could not conceivably be what they are if they had not had cheap labor. I am speaking very seriously, and this is not an overstatement: but I picked the cotton, I carried it to market, I built the railroads under someone else’s whip for nothing. For nothing. (2)

While Baldwin wasn’t a slave himself, he was the descendent of slaves and experienced the systems of economic separation that were still intact during his lifetime.

The evidence that Baldwin brings forth is historically accurate and overwhelming. Baldwin’s ability to trace past events and connect them to present realities is outstanding and the facts are evident to all who have stepped foot on American soil. Baldwin highlights a number of systems to show how structures on various levels can create a scenario where whites, because of privilege, look down upon African Americans. Baldwin explains, “It is a terrible thing that a people surrender to the notion that one-ninth of its population is beneath them.” (3) He contends it’s equally as sad when that one-ninth begins to question their own self-worth and place in society; he states, “it comes as a great shock, around the age of 5, 6 or 7, that the country you have pledged your allegiance to hasn’t pledged its allegiance to you.” (4)

To these cogent points, Buckley had no response. Yet his shortcomings in the debate are through no fault of his own. Buckley has a hard time understanding this point of view. He is neither black nor poor. He hasn’t walked in the shoes of the victimized and lacks understanding. Thus, his reference point is cloudy at best. He seems somewhat oblivious to the systems that have driven a wedge between people of color and their attainment of the American Dream. Baldwin says how it is, how he’s seen it and how he’s lived it, while Buckley has only read about it.

The goal of this unit is to help students unpack the narrative and the systems within it to understand how things look so different from one neighborhood to the next. I have worked in education for the past ten years. Many of the school textbooks that I have at my disposal tell a narrative of the nation’s history that I not only question, but also believe to be inconsistent with reality. While there are several lenses one can use to reflect on the collective reality of a society, my key focus is the story of black and brown people.

I currently live in Pittsburgh, the nation’s “Most Livable City” according to Forbes Magazine in 2010 and The Economist in 2014. It’s a smaller city but has one of everything. It boasts a number of sports, arts and cultural attractions. Pittsburgh has some of the greatest institutions of higher learning in America including Carnegie Mellon, The University of Pittsburgh, and Duquesne, not to mention UPMC and Highmark healthcare systems. Moreover, Pittsburgh’s cost of living is extremely low, and it is creating more jobs than it’s losing. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in February 2018, Pittsburgh had an unemployment rate of 3.9%, while the U.S. average was 4.1%. (5) While people don’t live lavishly here, magazine covers flaunt a city where everyone seems to be doing fairly well.

Yet when one takes the time to look a bit closer, particularly in the neighborhoods of Homewood and The Hill, a very different story is being told. Both areas are predominantly African American and are struggling to find their page in the story of America’s “Most Livable City.” I am not from this city, and so this reality puzzles and at times infuriates me. If the city’s prosperity is best represented by a pizza, how can some residents take four or five pieces of the pie while leaving others with only the crust? How can people be complicit with such a reality and not demand more of their local representatives, educational leaders and themselves? What present-day and historical barriers encourage this mindset?

While these obstacles confront my students daily, I want them to question what they see and ask for answers.

Moreover, I want them to ask “why?” How did the affluence scale become so unbalanced, both here and throughout the nation? In “the land of the free and the home of the brave,” why does it seem that in any urban city, people of color are more likely to come from challenging circumstances? Why does the real estate market trend upward when the majority of residents have lighter complexions and home values drop downward as skin tones darken?

The overarching idea of the unit is to introduce “America’s table of prosperity,” who set it and who assigned the seats. How are some allowed to eat hardy, while others are forced to fight over the leftovers? The table of the American Dream is not a buffet but a sit-down dinner, and only a select few have reservations. To help students understand these realities, the unit focuses on four topics: The Constitutional Convention and Federal Legislation, Education in America, Economic Opportunity and the Judicial System. How have these structures impacted black and brown people in the past and today? How have they created a gap between the haves and have nots? What can be done to change these realities?

While most of my day-to-day exposure is on a micro-level, the challenges facing urban schools impact educators throughout the nation. Anyone who has worked in city schools can sympathize with the similar challenges we willingly take on. Every person can learn from communities that don’t mirror their own. By examining how privilege is created and preserved, all parties will be better equipped to recognize it and begin to dismantle the inequities that support its infrastructure. If we are ever to truly create a dynamic where people are judged by their character and not their color, then this must be done in thought and consistent participation by everyone.

The Founding Fathers’ System

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” (6) These are the words expressed on July 4, 1776. Written by the Founding Fathers, the Declaration of Independence was a beacon of freedom to all “men” who lived not just in the United States, but everywhere in the world. Its foundation was rooted in the idea of common humanity for all. Such a concept of freedom seems like a sound ideal and respectable principle.

Another assertion in the Declaration of Independence is that “whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness.” (7) This claim represents the most common sense ideal of a civilized government: people whose government does not respect them or fails to look out for their common benefit should abolish that government and create another in its place.

While I believe that Thomas Jefferson had noble ideals when he began drafting the script for the birth of this nation, it seems that, like many things, the guarantees found in this document were never meant for the eyes of black and brown people. Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, fifty-five men in all, created the social and economic infrastructure we have today. They constructed our constitution, which was intended to make humanity the right of all men. However, it made certain that 700,000 thousand men and women, 13% of the nation, remained in bondage, devoid of opportunity, hope and freedom.

In 1968, almost 200 years after the Declaration was written, Dr. King gave his speech “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” at the Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee. In it, he uses the founding documents as primary evidence of broken promises.

All we say to America is, “Be true to what you said on paper.” If I lived in China or even Russia, or any totalitarian country, maybe I could understand some of these illegal injunctions. Maybe I could understand the denial of certain basic First Amendment privileges, because they hadn’t committed themselves to that over there. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right. And so just as I say, we aren’t going to let dogs or water hoses turn us around, we aren’t going to let any injunction turn us around. We are going on. (8)

Here we see America’s exceptionalism, a fascinating concept. Dr. King’s ancestors were considered property. His country did not embrace him or his ancestors, but still he loved those who would place him under their heel. He loved the nation, even though his nation didn’t love him.

Why? How could fifty-five men, who America holds up as the most upstanding, morally consciousness and forward-thinking leaders, construct such a plan that would knowingly set back a certain segment of society for generations? It’s important to understand the makeup of these “founding fathers.” The Birth of the Republic explains that it was a “convention of the well-bred, the well-fed, the well-read, and the well-wed.” (9) Here is the beginning of the reality of the construction of the American Dream, a selective “table” of opportunity sanctioned by the Constitution and built for white, landowning men. Time has camouflaged the table, but the structure and benefactors remain the same.

With each generation, America has gradually made steps forward to try to right the wrongs of its founders. Amendments to the Constitution, The Emancipation Proclamation, Civil Rights and Voting Rights legislation were designed and ratified to change the scope of how America does business, but they failed to fix the social, emotional and psychological tolls of slavery. The ratification of the Constitution, much like the Declaration of Independence, was an opportunity for equality for all. Yet it seems to be a rough draft; although amended and revised, it hasn’t reached the proficiency grade that would give credibility to those truths that we once held as self-evident. It is not the beginning of the gaps of opportunity based on race, but it widens that hole instead of closing it.

The Education System

As teachers, we are programed to steer our students toward their dreams through academic success. Education has always been a way to create opportunity where there wasn’t any before. However, it is no secret that many of the schools in this nation are struggling to educate brown and black children. This is a present-day reality, yet it started many years ago. During Reconstruction, the Freedmen’s Bureau began the task of educating former slaves and their children. The Bureau, with the help of African American communities and land grants from the Federal Government, built schools for Black children. It was also responsible for the construction of some of the nation’s first Historically Black Universities. While these local schools and universities did an admirable job of starting the education process for former slaves, they weren’t granted the adequate facilities and funding of their white counterparts.

In her book *White Rage*, Anderson analyzes how the 1896 Supreme Court decision of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* was used as a vehicle to promote classism by using race to send African Americans to inferior schools. With the 7-1 case ruling, the justices issued their verdict that separate was equal.

Almost immediately, the states seized on the 'separate' aspect, instituting racially distinct facilities from telephone booths to cemeteries. For nearly six decades, the same states that had consistently failed to provide anything approximating to 'equal' for America's black citizens. In reality white America never intended to create such a living standard as it would compete with their own. This would be was the Achilles heel that the NAACP's legal team attacked. (10)

Surveying the nation after *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the impact of the Supreme Court's decision on African American children is apparent. For example, in Virginia's Prince Edward County, there wasn't a high school for Blacks until 1939. Moton High, the only school constructed for African American students, was more than double its intended capacity. (11) In terms of funding for the entire county, \$330,000 was allocated for the education of 2,000 African American students, while 1,400 white students were appraised at \$1.2 million. (12)

Furthermore, in 1950, South Carolina spent more per capita on school buildings for white students than it did for black students. In Clarendon County, when a preacher asked for another bus to help transport African American students, R.W. Elliot, the acting chair of the school board replied, "We ain't got no money to buy a bus for your nigger children." (13)

Although this was the law of the land for many years, it came to a close on a federal level with *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which was supposed to end the segregation of schools. However, the White House seemed passive when enforcing the laws. Richard Conley, attorney for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, said, "integration would not be a precondition for obtaining funds unless the Southern-dominated congress decided it should be." (14) The attorney understood that such a statement on the federal level would make it unlikely for states to act aggressively on the local level. Because of the lack of initial assertiveness by the federal government, southern states felt emboldened to delay the integration of schools by proposing state laws that were unconstitutional but would cost civil rights groups time and finances to overturn. Herein lies a huge issue: the loss of time, our most limited resource.

Students were losing time to catch up and to gain equal access to classroom resources, remedial programs or advanced programs, and quality instruction. Time was stolen from these children by a system designed to intentionally keep them at a certain social and economic class. Much like the Founding Fathers, much like the American Dream, many Southerners had no intention of sharing the promise of education with a people they felt were supposed to be subservient to them.

As the nation tried to integrate, the suburbs began to expand. Ford, General Motors and Chrysler not only helped to create jobs for Americans, but the Interstate Highway Act helped to create an avenue for those who wanted to distance themselves from the city, while still allowing them the chance to work there during the day. We have a similar situation with the schools in America because they have been re-segregated by the great migration known as White Flight. The attraction of the suburbs naturally creates a certain type of isolationism that is often safeguarded by any means necessary. According to the UCLA Civil Rights Project,

Black and Latino students were in the most impoverished schools two decades earlier but those schools had a clear majority of non-poor classmates. Now the pattern is reversed, so that black and Latino students attend schools with substantial majorities- two-thirds- of poor classmates. This double segregation means serious isolation from racial and class diversity and exposure to many problems that systematically afflict poor

families and communities. (15)

This intentional setup makes sure certain children don't interact with others, creating a separation of thought and exposure that is detrimental to both sides.

At my own school, I have seen students merged from one struggling school into another. I remember sitting at the town hall meeting where parents from Wilkinsburg demanded other options, expressing that they were unhappy with merging with a school that seemed to be academically worse than their current school. I couldn't help but sympathize. Since the transition, my colleagues and I have tried to make those students feel as welcome as possible and I think we've been successful in that. We have the largest support staff in the district and we spend more per capita on our students than any other 6-12 grade school district-wide. However, with more than 80% of 8th graders scoring Below Basic in Math and more than 80% of 8th graders scoring Basic or Below Basic in ELA, I can't help but wonder if it would have been a better decision to move the Wilkinsburg students to a school that had a track record of higher performance. If we truly had the students' best interests at heart, why wouldn't we do this? How did district planners think that this was the best move? I can only assume it was perhaps the only option that allowed them to protect their priorities. In a city with a dwindling population, the fear of more White residents packing up and heading to the suburbs often trumps common sense logic.

When financial and academic resources head out of the city, many people try to send their students with those resources. However, when privileged families cross that bridge, they often put up borders to prevent others from following. In the 2007 Supreme Court Case *Seattle vs. Louisville*, the Supreme Court decided to severely limit the number of students who could be bussed from the city to the suburbs with a 4-1 vote, claiming that race was not enough to move students from their home schools. This allocation of resources has placed the best schools outside the reach of those most in need. Such a transition of people and resources is even more dangerous now than before. According to Sean F. Reardon of Stanford University, "school and neighborhood quality are linked. Schools in communities with abundant resources can draw on those resources in ways that schools in poor communities cannot. It is not clear whether school or residential segregation patterns are most important in shaping achievement." (16) We teach great students at our school, many of whom will overcome obstacles to get where they want to go. Yet the expectation for an entire subsection of students to overcome adversity is far from "equal." Government officials, backed by suburban influences, continue to keep things separate, here in "the land of the free and the home of the brave."

The Economic System

One of the most memorable one-liners by any president was uttered by Bill Clinton in his 1992 presidential campaign against candidate George Bush: "it's the economy, stupid." This seems like a simple concept, an idea that is both straightforward and rooted in common sense economic policy. A person's ability to provide financially has a psychological impact on how they see themselves and their contribution to society. The chance to plant the seed of prosperity in America was once the sales pitch to people in other lands. It brought the Europeans to Ellis Island and Asians to Angel Island. Yet when former slaves tried to plant their seed, they found the soil void of nutrients and the sunlight blocked, thus stunting their financial growth and spoiling the chance for the fruits that come with residual income and generational wealth.

Before his death, President Lincoln, along with Frederick Douglass, had begun planning for the transition of former slaves to a post-war America. The first pieces of legislation that were created to provide freedoms for people of color were the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Each of these provided a certain level of rights to citizenship for former slaves in America. The Election of 1866 allowed for radical Republicans to take charge of Congress. These individuals would push the executive branch to use the army to oversee efforts to rebuild a south that provided African Americans with political, professional, and educational opportunities. Many Blacks fought to gain control over their working conditions. With the help of radical Republicans, they fought for U.S. Senate Bill 60, which “would have made the Freedmen’s Bureau a permanent national agency and also enable freed blacks to own their own land.” (17) More importantly, this bill would have created a federal agency to serve African Americans throughout the South for the foreseeable future. Blacks would be able to purchase land at lower prices and begin to build wealth that they could pass on to future generations. Unfortunately, like the initial promise of forty-acres and a mule of 1865, this did not come to pass. President Andrew Johnson vetoed the bill and the Senate was unable to overturn his veto, coming up short by only two votes. The system of oppression had struck again, planting the seed of economic stagnation for a people who were soon to be facing the dark days of Jim Crow.

What does this mean? For starters, it means that African Americans would have trouble creating wealth for their families because they didn’t have access to the necessary tools such as financial institutions, loans, legal representation and protection from intimidation brought forth by the Klu-Klux-Klan and other White Supremist groups. Moreover, it was the start of several moves by the U.S. government to exclude African Americans from future programs including the New Deal Rules, Social Security Act, Critical Labor Provisions and the G.I. Bill. (18) These purposeful acts continued to allow one group to cut the line of prosperity and force others to watch as they “eat.” Is this not the nation that spent billions on a Marshall Plan, a plan to rebuild an entire continent? It seems the open hand that was bestowed upon Europeans was and has remained a closed fist to people of color in the United States for centuries.

Social welfare programs aligned with Reconstruction that supported former slaves were eliminated. The structure of the southern systems began to gain traction, and by 1900 there was a resurgence of Southern Democrats. Richard Valley notes that a House report from the 53rd Congress of 1893-1895 demanded, “every trace of reconstruction measures be wiped from the book. By 1911 this goal was effectively met.” (19) Yet in spite of all these barriers, African American communities still made every effort to find their own American Dream. Two examples of this are Tulsa and Rosewood.

Tulsa, Oklahoma serves as an example of African American entrepreneurship that was destroyed by resentment and the idea that not all lives are created equal. Greenwood was the sector of Tulsa where African Americans set up their homes, a result of the oil boom in 1902 that brought people from around the country to Tulsa. This area boasted its own movie theater, banks, restaurants, clubs, and various other commercial businesses, including over 11,000 black Tulsa residents. (20) It was the epicenter of economic prosperity for people of color in the south. Many of the African American men living there were veterans of the First World War and carried themselves with a level of pride foreign to whites and many blacks at that time. (21) Their unapologetic pride and financial success often led to resentment from neighboring white communities.

On May 31, 1921, an African American man named Dick Rowlands was accused of groping a white woman, Sara Page, in an elevator. When white residents heard the news, they called for the execution by lynching of the young man. A scuffle broke out and shots were fired. White residents soon overwhelmed the African American defenders and burned the city of Greenwood to the ground, killing over thirty people and leaving over nine thousand homeless. When blacks tried to rebuild, their insurance claims were denied. While this lack

of humanity is disappointing, what is more appalling is the government's decision to refrain from pursuing legal action. (22)

A similar example is Rosewood, a small town located in Florida. Although racially integrated and less developed, it had an area of town that was primarily populated by African Americans and could have served as a springboard as an economic hub for people of color. Unfortunately, on January 1, 1923, Fannie Taylor, a white woman engaging in an extramarital affair, was physically injured by her lover during a dispute. In order to maintain her secret, she told her husband that a black man attacked her. White people in the community believed that Jesse Hunter, an escaped convict, was to blame and went to Hunter's home. Although they did not find him, they found and lynched Aaron Carrier who they suspected of aiding in Hunter's escape. (23)

Like Tulsa, in Rosewood there were African Americans who were willing to defend their homes and families. One of those men, Sylvester Creek, defended his home when his front door was kicked in. He shot and killed two men and wounded four others. Word of whites being killed by blacks quickly spread and soon, two hundred armed white men descended on the town of Rosewood. One white resident of the community attested that "it was open season on niggers around here." (24) Within a matter of days, all of the homes of black residents living in Rosewood were destroyed by the mob. Most African Americans who lived in Rosewood never returned and lost the land that they owned due to unpaid taxes in the years to come. (25)

The Judicial System

While all of these systems are important, the judicial system is the one system that tends to have the ability to paralyze a person's trajectory towards success and limit options upon release. It takes fathers away from their daughters and sons away from their mothers. The absence of these figures causes unintended consequences for those they leave behind. Moreover, those who do find themselves in the web of judicial red tape often find themselves stuck, both while behind bars and when they leave the exit door.

Similar to The Fresh Princes' Carlton and Will, in 2004 as an undergrad at Morehouse College, my cousin and I found ourselves in Fulton County Jail for the night. I had been an accomplice to my cousin as he jaywalked. I did it. I'm guilty. They caught me red-handed. For this, we were thrown on the pavement of Peachtree Street without warning and cuffed. My car was impounded. We spent that night in Fulton County Jail. Although a misdemeanor, the way it was written up has "the crime" defined as Reckless Conduct. What could have been solved with a ticket has had lasting consequences as I've had to explain this in every job interview, graduate application and background check since the incident. Yet this wasn't the thing that resonated with me the most from that night. It was that every face but one in that jail was black. In a room with over a hundred people, there was only one white face. And so another question within the unit is this: when people say they want "law and order," as a black man in America, should I believe in the law and does the law believe in me?

In addition to how the laws are interpreted, it's also important to understand the incentives to be gained by the frequency of their enforcement. In *Race to Incarcerate*, the author describes the transition America made from 1972 when it had a total of 300,000 prisoners to the current number of 2.3 million. (26) Furthermore, from 1980 to 1993, the federal spending on unemployment and training programs was cut nearly in half, while spending on correctional facilities rose 521%. (27) The money-spending situation continued with the 1994 Guards, Administrators, Suppliers; it all comes with a price tag. Once these massive infrastructures are built,

they have to be maintained and cannot close or drop too far in population. The Crime Bill of 1994 allocated \$8 billion for prisons, \$8.8 billion for policing, and \$1.8 billion on the incarceration of undocumented immigrants. The wave of federal funding from this bill created jobs and boosted the economy in states. Thus, there is an incentive for state legislators to not only increase the amount of convictions, but also extend the jail time for convicted offenders and decrease the number of prisoners granted parole. The more people you put in jails, the more jails you have to build.

While using prisons for profit is an immoral practice, the glaring reality of the system is that it profits off of those who cannot protect themselves, many of whom are black and brown people (refer to the Education, Economy, and Founding Fathers sections to see why this is the reality). *Race to Incarcerate* explains this dynamic with different programs and initiatives carried out on a state and federal level. In 1980, African Americans made up 35% of arrests for drug sales, but that number soared to 47% by the year 2000. Yet, nationally, 24% of white teenagers reported that “it’s easy to find cocaine in my neighborhood” compared to African Americans teenagers that came in only slightly higher at 29%. African Americans make up only 12.3% of this country’s entire population. Blacks are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than whites, thus reducing their financial ability to hire quality legal representation when needed. Because of the disparity in the amount of legal representation, many African Americans find themselves under siege by eager prosecutors and a system that is unsympathetic to the struggles, a result of other systems designed to prey upon their condition.

By understanding the conflicting realities of the birth of the nation, along with the complexities in the educational, economic, and judicial systems, students and educators will be more prepared to study and find solutions to the social inequities plaguing our nation.

Activities: Instructions to Teachers

The Beautiful Mind Lecture Series (All Systems)

I’m not a mathematician, but I have a great appreciation for chalk and their boards. If you ever watched films such as “Good Will Hunting,” “The Beautiful Mind” and/or “The Theory of Everything,” you will have an appreciation for the communicative skills that these relatively primitive boards possess. First, you must distribute a handout of 25-30 historical terms, concepts and/or events. Students will have to make their own notes about each. Then, you’ll put those same terms on the chalkboard and explain their significance. Be sure to make connections to different events and show how they’re connected to the overarching ideas. You can differentiate instruction by allowing students that are beyond proficiency to present the lecture to students that are proficient and approaching proficiency. This presents an opportunity for you to work with individual students who may be on the lower-end of approaching proficiency. At the end of each lecture, you will stamp students’ completed sheets for a participation grade and review major points as an entire group. They will use these guided notes and make notecards for a homework grade, which will serve as their study guide and will be checked while they are taking their unit assessment.

Dissecting the Declaration of Independence and Constitution (Founding Fathers)

Assign students to work in groups of four. Instruct them to read an abridged version of The Declaration of Independence. Each student in the group has a role: recorder, presenter, editor, and translator.

Roles:

Recorder- takes notes and creates a PowerPoint Presentation

Presenter- presents the material to the class

Editor- leads the analysis of the Primary Sources, looking for inconsistencies, hypocritical statements

Translator- helps the group to create a new Declaration of Independence and Constitution that is translated to explain what the Founding Fathers actually meant (Example: “we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal”... Translation- We don’t believe in truth so don’t ask about it. All highborn white men are created equal. Everyone else must be subservient to them.)

Black Wallstreet: The Building Permit (Economic System)

Instruct students to build a Black Wallstreet. Each person in class creates a business they feel is essential to a community. They must give their business a name and create a blueprint on how their business will thrive. As they present, ask students to explain why it is important to have such a business in their community and how it will benefit the overall welfare of all people and all stakeholders.

The Unit Soundtrack and This is America Track (All Systems)

Ask students to identify metaphors, mental/visual pictures and make a claim to what the overarching ideas are surrounding each of the following songs. Instruct them to write a reflection paragraph on each video. Ask them to make connections to the unit and show how the videos, messages, lyrics, and images connect to the systems we’ve discussed in class.

Common- Letter to the Free

Marvin Gay- What’s Going On

Trick Daddy- Amerika

Jay Z- The Story of O.J.

Jay-Z- The War on Drugs

NAS- Not for the Radio

Common- Letter for Free

“This is America” Project (All Systems)

Ask students to make their own adaptation of “This is America,” using what we learned from the lectures, films and musical scores. Each student should be able to write fifteen “bars” (lines) that have ten historical references that provide a verbal illustration of the history of oppression in America through the systems.

The American Pie (All Systems)

Note: If you question your level of classroom management skills, you may elect to skip this step.

Purchase a Domino's or Pizza Hut Pizza. Once you have your pizza, explain to your students that this pizza represents the American Dream. Start handing out slices to two thirds of the class but tell them not to eat the crust. Place the remaining third's slices on plates but give it to those who have already eaten saying, "does anyone want seconds?" Next, explain to the class that this example represents the minority plight within the American society and it is a result of the systems we've talked about. Tell the students that are eating to put their crust on a plate. Lift up the plate and tell them that this is what's left for that third of society that has been neglected. Now ask the entire class to write a response (100 words) about what they saw and how it made them feel. Their response should explain how the lesson serves as a metaphor for access to the American Dream and how that one-third should feel. While the students are writing, go across the hall and get the pizza you've stashed for those who haven't eaten. In Mr. Means' class, everybody eats!

Make America Great Again vs. Make America Better (All Systems)

Part A: Students are making a New Constitutional Convention. Instruct them to write a short narrative that reflects what America looks like based on the guidelines and opinions of the Founding Fathers. Their reaction should explain what would immediately change in our society and who would benefit from those changes.

Part B: Students are given the task to make America better.

A Restorative Circle

Work with the local police departments where everyone feels heard and respected. These can be just in a classroom or done by grade level. It's important to make sure that the students are prepared on how a positive restorative circle is managed so that everyone will be heard and the group can begin to find solutions to common problems and miscommunications.

Dinner and a Movie

Synopsis

The dinner and a movie model allows students to view and reflect on full-length films that are relevant to what we are currently studying. The films will be shown after school in the interest of time. Students will be more likely to attend films that are modern in addition to receiving participation credit (this should be extra credit because it takes place after school). Bring popcorn and punch. If your budget permits, you can buy pizza (everyone loves pizza).

Waiting for Superman

Filmmaker Davis Guggenheim reminds us that education "statistics" have names: Anthony, Francisco, Bianca, Daisy, and Emily, whose stories make up the engrossing foundation of *Waiting for Superman*. As he follows a handful of promising students through a system that inhibits, rather than encourages, academic growth, Guggenheim undertakes an exhaustive review of public education, surveying "drop-out factories" and "academic sinkholes," methodically dissecting the system and its seemingly intractable problems. (imdb.com)

The Inconvenient Truth Behind Waiting for Superman

A group of New York City public school teachers and parents wrote and produced this documentary in response to Davis Guggenheim's highly misleading film, 'Waiting for Superman.' 'The Inconvenient Truth Behind Waiting for Superman' provides a critique of an increasingly free-market driven education system, the undermining of teacher unions and overall faith in the idea that charter schools are just what the country needs. The film highlights the real life experiences of public school parents and educators and takes a holistic look at education reform.(imdb.com)

The 13TH

An in-depth look at the prison system in the United States and how it reveals the nation's history of racial inequality. (imdb.com)

The Central Park-5

A documentary that examines the 1989 case of five black and Latino teenagers who were convicted of raping a white woman in Central Park. After having spent between 6 and 13 years each in prison, a serial rapist confessed to the crime. (imdb.com)

Rosewood

Dramatization of a 1923 horrific racist lynch mob attack on an African American community.

Field Trip

Students

The African American History Museum is four hours from our school. Throughout the year, we will fundraise with Go Fund Me campaigns and other fundraisers to raise money for transportation to the museum. If prices remain as they currently are, we should be able to take at least two busloads of 11th graders. To cut down on cost, we will return that same night.

Staff

Every school is required to participate in some form of professional development and much like the lessons we give our students, it is important that we make our PDs relevant to the teachers' challenges and growth needs. We have struggled to inspire collective buy-in regarding restorative practices and PBIS at our school. These practices focus on rewarding positive behavior instead of punishment or negative reinforcement. Let me be transparent, I have struggled with this too because they seldom address the behaviors that often derail the learning environment. However, the more I study, the more I see the need for PBIS to be properly implemented.

My proposal is that the administration and school staff take a bus ride to explore the communities that feed into our school and also the city jail. Before the trip, the teachers will have a required summer reading regarding the prison-to-pipeline system and an additional day of PD to review and share ideas prior to the trip. Unfortunately, a few students are currently serving time for minor offenses; seeing them behind bars and

recalling the school's disciplinary practices will reaffirm the need for these initiatives and encourage more participation by all parties. This will result in a collective effort to take on these challenges together because we have now seen first-hand what happens when we take the path of least resistance.

Standards

Standard - CC.8.5.11-12.B

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

Standard - CC.8.5.11-12.C

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Standard - CC.8.5.11-12.G

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Standard - CC.8.6.11-12.F

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Standard - CC.8.6.11-12.F

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation

Standard - CC.8.6.11-12.H

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Notes

1. "School Fast Facts," Pennsylvania School Performance Profile, accessed July 17, 2018, <http://www.paschoolperformance.org/Profile/27516>.
2. James Baldwin, "The American Dream," *New York Times*, March 7, 1965, <https://www.nytimes.com/images/blogs/papercuts/baldwin-and-buckley.pdf>.

3. Baldwin, "The American Dream."
4. Baldwin, "The American Dream."
5. "Unemployment in the Pittsburgh Area by County," Bureau of Labor Statistics, last modified May 18, 2018, https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/unemployment_pittsburgh.htm.
6. "The Declaration of Independence," National Archives, accessed July 15, 2018, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration>.
7. "The Declaration of Independence."
8. Martin Luther King Jr., "I've Been to the Mountaintop" (speech, Memphis, TN, April 3, 1968), <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/ive-been-mountaintop-address-delivered-bishop-charles-mason-temple>.
9. Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia: The Story of the Constitutional Convention May- September 1787* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1986), 103.
10. Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 67.
11. Anderson, *White Rage*, 68.
12. Anderson, *White Rage*, 67.
13. Anderson, *White Rage*, 70.
14. Anderson, *White Rage*, 93.
15. Gary Orfield, Jongyeon Ee, Erica Frankenberg, and Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, "Brown at 62: School Segregation by Race Poverty and State," *Civil Rights Project*, UCLA (May 16, 2016): 7.
16. Sean F. Reardon, "School Segregation and Racial and Academic Achievement," *CEPA Working Paper* no. 15-12 (October 2015): 1-34, <https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/wp15-12v201510.pdf>
17. Andrea Flynn, Susan R. Holmberg, Dorian Warren, and Felicia Wong, *The Hidden Rules of Race* (New York: Cambridge University, 2017), 20.
18. Flynn, Holmberg, Warren and Wong, *The Hidden Rules of Race*, 23.
19. Flynn, Holmberg, Warren and Wong, *The Hidden Rules of Race*, 22.
20. Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1992).
21. Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*.
22. Chris M. Messer, "The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Toward an Integrative Theory of Collective Violence," *Journal of Social History*, 44, no. 4 (July 2011): 1217-1232, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2011.0053>.
23. R. Thomas Dye, "The Rosewood Massacre: History and the Making of Public Policy," *The Public Historian*, 19, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 25-39, doi:10.2307/3379554.
24. Dye, "The Rosewood Massacre: History and the Making of Public Policy."
25. Dye, "The Rosewood Massacre: History and the Making of Public Policy."
26. Sabrian Jones, Marc Mauer, and Michelle Alexander, *Race to Incarcerate* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 15.
27. Jones, Mauer, and Alexander, *Race to Incarcerate*, 47.

Bibliography

Adams, Francis and Sanders, Barry. *Alienable Rights: The Exclusion of African Americans in White Man's Land 1619-2000*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003.

Anderson, Carol. *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Baldwin, James. "The American Dream." *New York Times*, March 7, 1965.

<https://www.nytimes.com/images/blogs/papercuts/baldwin-and-buckley.pdf>.

Burns, Sarah. *The Central Park Five*. New York: Alfred Knop, 2011.

Cone, James H. *Martin and Malcom: A Dream or Nightmare*. New York: Obris Books, 1992.

Drinker Bowen, Catherine. *Miracle at Philadelphia: The Story of the Constitutional Convention May- September 1787*. New York: Back Bay Books, 1986.

Dye, R. Thomas. "The Rosewood Massacre: History and the Making of Public Policy." *The Public Historian*, 19, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 25-39. doi:10.2307/3379554.

Ellsworth, Scott. *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1992.

Flynn, Andrea, Holmberg, Susan R., Warren, Dorian and Wong, Felicia. *The Hidden Rules of Race*. New York: Cambridge University, 2017.

Forman, James. *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*. New York: Farrar, Stratus and Giroux, 2017.

Honely, Michael K. *To The Promise Land: Martin Luther King and the Fight for Economic Justice*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.

Jones, Sabrian, Mauer, Marc and Alexander, Michelle. *Race to Incarcerate*. New York: The New Press, 2013.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "I've Been to the Mountaintop." Speech, Memphis, TN, April 3, 1968.

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/ive-been-mountaintop-address-delivered-bishop-charles-mason-temple>.

Messer, Chris M. "The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Toward an Integrative Theory of Collective Violence." *Journal of Social History*, 44, no. 4 (July 2011): 1217-1232. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2011.0053>.

Meyer, Stephen G. *As Long As They Don't Move Next Door*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.

Orfield, Gary, Ee, Jongyeon, Frankenberg, Erica, and Siegel-Hawley, Genevieve "Brown at 62: School Segregation by Race Poverty and State." *Civil Rights Project* (May 16, 2016): 1-9.

<https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/brown-at-62-school-segregation-by-race-poverty-and-state/Brown-at-62-final-corrected-2.pdf>.

Reardon, Sean F. "School Segregation and Racial Academic Achievement Gaps." *CEPA Working Paper* No. 15-12 (October 2015): 1-34. <https://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/wp15-12v201510.pdf>.

"School Fast Facts." Pennsylvania School Performance Profile. Accessed July 15, 2018.

<http://www.paschoolperformance.org/Profile/27516>.

"The Declaration of Independence." National Archives. Accessed July 15, 2018. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration>.

"Unemployment in the Pittsburgh Area by County." Bureau of Labor Statistics. Last modified May 18, 2018.

https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/unemployment_pittsburgh.htm.

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use